

CHAPTER TWELVE

Love Magic: *Creating the Elixir of Life*

— The Magic Mead —

Spellcasting, the ability to conjure words and runes to ripple the flow of Wyrð, to make tiny interventions in the forces of fate, was the glittering prize at the centre of Odin's initiatory quest. He wanted it, needed it, not for his self-glorification, even though Odin never shrank from claiming the brightest firelight in the world of the gods. No. He sought it for the Aesir, the warrior gods, and for Middle Earth, the ecstatically inspired shamans, the people who could turn such knowledge to advantage in healing, fortune-telling, sacred ceremony.

The story from the ancient manuscripts which best captures Odin's battles of wit and strength, love and 'powers' from Mimir, in search of wisdom is his journey to the stronghold of the giants.¹ He goes to the mountain castles of Suttung the fire giant to obtain, by any means necessary, three draughts of a special drink, the mead of 'poetic inspiration', the drink which confers the knowledge to use word-magic.

Hanging on the World Tree, undergoing his ritual initiation, Odin says, when 'Nine lays of power I learned from the famous Bolthor, father of Bestla: I got a draught of precious mead, Mixed with magic Odrerir . . . Learned I grew then, lore-wise, Waxed and throve well.' What exactly was the nature of this mead? Why did it render him learned, lore-wise and thriving? And how did Odin get it? The answers to these questions open another doorway to the hidden world of wisdom of the people of Wyrð.

According to Snorri Sturluson, the special mead which was to become the target of Odin's most dangerous quest was created originally as part of a pact between the two warring tribal groups of gods,

the warrior gods and the fertility gods, near the beginning of time.

Snorri Sturluson records a question and answer session between the gods. 'Where did the accomplishment known as poetry come from?' said one god. This was a deep question, of course, for as we have already seen earlier, poetry was considered to be of great import. It was not, as today, regarded as a minor and specialised form of literature. Rather, poets were lauded for their skills in 'capturing' life in the magic of words. And for shamans the power of poetry was the forming of spells and charms.

As we have seen, when the gods made peace, from their joint saliva was conjured a man called Kvasir, who was original knowledge. But at this point, competition for possession of Kvasir's knowledge began. The polarities, the forces pulling this way and that for the balance of the cosmos, begin to wrest the knowledge from the human figure of Kvasir. The story goes that he came once to feast with some dwarfs. Two of them, Fjalar and Galar, 'called him aside for a word in private and killed him, letting his blood run into two crocks and one kettle'. These were no ordinary containers, for the dwarfs were figures of transformation. The crocks were known as Son and Bothn; the kettle was called Odrorir. The dwarfs mixed Kvasir's blood with honey, and from it brewed the mead which makes whoever drinks it a wise person with the inspiration of poetry. The warrior gods heard that Kvasir had died. They demanded to know from the dwarfs what had happened. 'The dwarfs told the Aesir that Kvasir had choked with learning, because there was no one sufficiently well-informed to compete with him in knowledge.'

But the two dwarfs, though possessing the mead of inspiration, obviously did not profit from it directly. They continued their blood-thirsty ways. They killed a giant in an accident at sea, and then his wife. This was a big mistake, for when the giant's son, called Suttung, heard of the murders, he went to the dwarfs, seized them and took them out to sea, where he chained them on to a skerry covered by the tide. The dwarfs begged Suttung to spare their lives, offering him as compensation for the death of his father the precious magic mead of knowledge. Suttung accepted the deal, took the mead home and hid it in the inner recesses of his mountain dwelling, which was known as

Knit Mountain. He appointed his daughter Gunnloth as its guardian.

'This is why we call poetry Kvasir's blood,' says Snorri, 'or dwarfs' drink or intoxication, or some sort of liquid of Odrorir or Bothn or Son, or dwarfs' ship, because it was that mead which ransomed them from death on the skerry, or Suttung's mead . . .' It was Suttung's mead which was the object of Odin's vision quest to the land of the giants.

— The Story of the Journey to Knit Mountain —

We are told the story of Odin's quest for the sacred mead in Snorri's *Prose Edda*, and in a section of the famous poem from the *Havamal* which I introduced in the chapter on the World Tree. In order to gain access to the mead, Odin has to journey to the land of the giants, the mythical landscape on the edge of Middle Earth. It is a quest which tests all Odin's nine lays of power, and involves him in attempting to win the mead through the shamanic arts of love. It also leaves him in a crisis of choice between the ultimate concerns of his quest and personal love.

Odin set out on his journey to Jotunheim, the land of the giants, a journey in mythical time where hours in the imaginal can be experienced as days, weeks, or even months.

His long trek was finally rewarded with a sight of the giants' Otherworld, a bucolic scene of nine giant men in a line, slowly advancing across a vast field, cutting hay. Odin's eye (he now had only one) took in the situation in a flash. Without breaking stride, but with all his senses alert, he strode up to them. They regarded him suspiciously, but continued their work. Odin hooked his hands in his belt and watched them for a few moments, his head cocked on one side critically. He saw his opportunity. A plan formed in his mind.

He stepped closer. The giants stopped scything, the sweat of hard labour dripping from their noses, and glared at him. Quickly, while he was still alive, Odin asked if they would like him to sharpen their scythes. Eagerly they agreed that they would. They laid their scythes down and gratefully sprawled about, resting. Odin took a sharpening hone from his belt and deftly put an edge on their tools. The giants

reformed their line, tried cutting again, and were mightily impressed. With grunts and murmurs of approval, they all agreed they could cut much better and easier with the sharpened scythes. Odin asked whether one of them would like to buy his sharpening tool. Not surprisingly, they all wanted it.

Odin said that the price of the hone for whoever purchased it should be paid by his giving a banquet. The giants, who were not very bright, did not recognise this as a strange bargain. They were no longer suspicious, just keen to make their work easier. And whichever one of them owned the sharpening tool would have the sharpest scythe and the easiest work of all. The giants put their scythes over their shoulders and crowded round, all demanding that they should be the one given the hone. Odin suddenly flung the hone high up into the air, and as they all scrambled to catch it the sharpened scythes whirled around in their hands, cutting one another's throats. They fell dead. Odin smiled at the 'sharpness' of his wit. Mimir would be pleased.

Having successfully accomplished the first step of his quest, Odin now pressed on in search of the employer of the nine dead giants. He already knew who it was, for Mimir had 'told' him. He was a giant called Baugi, and Odin knew also that he was the brother of Suttung, who had the mead.

As the sun set over the land of the giants, Odin strode up to the huge door of Baugi's house, knocked on it nine times, and when the giant appeared Odin sought lodgings for the night. Later that evening, as they sat talking, Baugi confessed that his affairs had taken a turn for the worse: his nine workers had all killed one another and, he complained, he would now have no hope of finding any other labourers at this time of the summer, when crops were being harvested. Odin, giving his name as Baleworker, proposed an unusual deal. He offered to do the work of nine men for Baugi, and asked as wages at the end of the harvest one drink of Suttung's mead.

Surprised, Baugi protested that he had nothing to do with the mead, adding that Suttung was anxious to keep it under his exclusive control. Odin/Baleworker insisted that was his price for the work in the fields. Baugi was desperate. He agreed to go along with the spirit

of Odin's proposal at least. He could not guarantee a drink of the mead but he promised that he would, at the end of the harvesting season, take him to see Suttung to make his request.

That summer Odin did the work of nine men for Baugi, and when winter came he asked Baugi for his payment. They both went to see Suttung. Baugi told his brother of his bargain with Odin, but Suttung flatly refused them a single drop of mead. Baugi smiled to himself. He had known all along that this would be Suttung's response.

As soon as they left Suttung's presence, Odin remonstrated with Baugi, saying that he had not yet fulfilled his bargain to help him get some of the mead; that they must try to get hold of the mead by some kind of trick.

Baugi pretended that he thought this was a good idea, although he never really had the intention of helping Odin to get some of his brother's mead. Odin produced a hand drill, the auger called Rati, and said that Baugi was to use his giant strength to bore a hole right through the centre of the mountain where Suttung kept the mead hidden under the guard of Gunnloth. Baugi, putting his giant's strength behind the drilling, bored into the rock. Finally he stepped back, said that he had now fulfilled his pledge to help Odin, and that he was going to leave.

But Odin did not trust the giant, and to test it he blew into the hole left by the auger; chips of stone flew back into his face, and he knew that Baugi had not pierced right through as he had promised to do. He realised then that Baugi wanted to cheat him, and angrily told him to try harder. Baugi bored again, and when Odin blew into the hole for the second time the chips were blown through. Instantly Odin shapeshifted into a snake (one of his 'lays of power') and crawled into the auger hole, Baugi stabbing wildly at him with the auger but just missing. Odin slithered towards the centre of the mountain.

The detail of what happened in the centre of the mountain is frustratingly vague. Snorri tells us only that Odin, in the guise of Baleworker, 'came to where Gunnloth was, and slept with her for three nights, and then she promised him three drinks of the mead. At his first drink he drank up all that was in Odrorir, at his second, Bothn, and at his third, Son – and then he had finished all the mead. Then he

changed himself into an eagle and flew away at top speed.'

The last part of the story depicts Odin as having to run from Suttung the giant. Snorri tells us that

When Suttung saw the eagle in flight, however, he also took on eagle shape and flew after him. Now when the Aesir saw where Odin was flying, they put their crocks out in the courtyard, and when Odin came inside Asgard he spat the mead into the crocks. It was such a close shave that Suttung did not catch him, however, that he let some fall, but no one bothered about that. Anyone who wants could have it; we call it poetasters share. Odin gave Suttung's mead to the Aesir and those men who can compose poetry. So we call poetry Odin's catch, Odin's discovery, his drink and his gift, and the drink of the Aesir.

But we need to build a closer picture of Odin's encounter with Gunnloth. How did he get her to promise him three drinks of the sacred mead?

— What Happened in the Mountain? —

The crux of our understanding of Odin's quest for the mead is the events in the mountain, especially the relationship between Odin and Gunnloth. Snorri's outline of the story leaves us starved of the main details, but fortunately we are able to develop a fuller picture by reference to other fragmentary accounts which have survived over the past thousand years.

For example, Odin says in *Havamal*:² 'The heron of forgetfulness hovers over banquets and steals away men's wits: I myself was fettered with that bird's feathers when I lay in Gunnloth's house. I was drunk – I was dead drunk at the wise Fjalar's: and the only comfort is that a drunkard's wits do come home when he's sober.' In addition to the accurate observations on the effects of heavy drinking on one's faculties, these lines are revealing. It is clear that Odin was drunk in the mountain stronghold, 'in Gunnloth's house'. And when he is dead drunk 'at the wise Fjalar's' he is referring to one of the dwarfs who was responsible for creating the mead in the first place by killing Kvasir, and mixing his blood with honey to create the inspirational drink.³

Odin's statement could mean a number of things. In the literal progression of the story, it could mean that Odin was referring to Fjalar sarcastically as 'wise', for it is possible to see him as not wise, in that he won the right to make the mead, and then had to bargain it away to save his life. But while he had possession of the magic mead, Fjalar had access to wisdom, and it seems more likely that Odin was thinking of him in these terms. Another possibility is that during his sojourn in the mountain with Gunnloth the two of them journeyed to Otherworlds. If so, then it is possible that they went to the Lowerworld abode of Fjalar, where they got drunk on the mead. Or drunk on other alcoholic drink, like ale, *talking* about the mead!

Odin might also be making the reference to Fjalar in mythological terms, in which he adopts the identity of Fjalar as a drinker, or at least seeker after the mead. Draughts of the mead might even be referred to as being 'at the wise Fjalar's' in that the dwarf's name could refer to the mead itself. In this case, Odin is telling us that he became 'dead drunk' drinking from the magic mead.

It does not seem likely that Odin was drunk with knowledge, for he refers to his state as being witless. Becoming drunk, and forgetting his wits, does not seem like the behaviour that Odin would have liked to have seen in himself. Obviously something went wrong. Was it the power of the mead? That he simply could not handle it?

In one of the poetic texts he refers to Gunnloth as 'that best of women within whose arms I had lain'.⁴ It is possible that the fact that he is drunk and forgets his wits is due not only to the inebriating effect of the mead, but also his feelings towards Gunnloth. So it is conceivable that when Odin says he forgot his wits, he might have been forgetting the purpose of his quest.

A few very important lines of poetry are from *The Words of the High One*:

Gunnlod sat in the golden seat,
poured me precious mead:
Ill-reward she had from me for that,
For her proud and passionate heart,
Her brooding foreseeing spirit.

What I won from her I have well used:
I have waxed in wisdom since I came back,
bringing to Asgard Odrerir,
the sacred draught.⁵

The poet then permits himself this comment: 'Odin, I am sure, had taken the oath on the ring; who shall ever believe his word again? He swindled Suttung out of his mead and left Gunnlod to weep.' There are many different kinds of pledges that Odin could have taken. But one possibility is that he had pledged his love – and perhaps marriage – to Gunnloth in return for three drinks of the mead. The implication of the poet is that Odin was duplicitous, and pledged to Gunnloth simply in order to gain drinks of the mead. He says, in another line of poetry: 'I let her have ill repayment for her loyal heart and faithful love.' It appears that he violated warrior honour by pledging to Gunnloth and then breaking the pledge.

But there is another possibility: Odin has admitted that he was drunk in Gunnloth's house, and as a consequence had 'lost his wits', but that fortunately they came back to him when he sobered up. I think that Odin returned Gunnloth's love, became drunk on the mead and forgot the purpose of his mission. And it was only after he got his 'mind back in order' that he had to face up to the reality of his impossibly hard choice: the choice between staying with Gunnloth, whom he loves, or having to break his pledge and her heart to serve the purpose of his quest.

Gunnloth must have supported him, however sadly, when he made his decision, for he says that it is down to her that he escaped by the skin of his teeth from Suttung's kingdom: 'I doubt whether I should ever have escaped from the giants' garth if Gunnloth had not helped me – that best of women within whose arms I had lain. Next day, the frost giants came . . . asking after Baleworker, whether he was back with the gods or had Suttung managed to kill him?'⁶ Drunk on all the mead and Gunnlod has to help him with his spells to turn into an eagle?

But Odin was on a quest; he had to fight the wish to indulge his love for Gunnloth, and so to leave her. And he knows that his personal sacrifice, if that was what it was, worked well, for he says: 'The

fraud-got mead has profited me well and the wise man lacks nothing now that Odrerir is come up into the midst of men on earth.⁷ This is his pride in that he opted for service rather than indulgence, but fraud-got – obviously in getting this knowledge he was not following the accepted rules of social etiquette and warrior courtesy. Indeed by this he seems to have accepted that he had to make a compromise and that his quest transcended personal feelings.

— The Parallels Between the Mead Love Ritual and Tantra —

The ancient sources do not explain exactly what went on in the mountain. Scholars agree that Odin and Gunnloth engaged in some sort of 'love magic'; perhaps the details were in the original stories, but Christian censorship has led to them being dropped, just as the 'outrageous' sexual elements of Freya's ceremonies (which Snorri called 'turpitude' or 'base wickedness') for women have been lost.⁸

But this leaves us with only the manifest content of the myth. I think that if we knew more about the 'love magic', we would understand more deeply the nature and significance of the 'mead of knowledge'. And I believe that we can reconstruct the details of the encounter between Odin and Gunnloth if we tease out the meaning of the clues in the ancient manuscripts by comparative analysis, in which the information is considered in relation to the elaborated rituals of other, related traditions.

Many scholars of European mythology and religion propose that an infusion of some of the beliefs, practices and stories from Asia came into ancient Europe and Scandinavia early in the first millennium.⁹ Whether there was an actual importing of these traditions into Europe from the East, or whether the obvious parallels are due rather to separate cultural traditions expressing the same universal human truths in similar ways does not really matter here. Either way, the important thing is that there are striking parallels which might indicate a common tradition, and which provide a basis from which we might explore what Odin and Gunnloth got up to behind the locked doors of a sacred cavern deep in the heart of Knit Mountain. It is a bit

involved, but I think it is worth it, for the insights the analysis affords locate the secrets of Wyrd, the inspiration of the 'magic mead', within the meditational compass of men and women. More than this, it is composed of the essence of love.

The Eastern traditions which eventually elaborated into Hinduism and Buddhism had their ancient origins, going back at least two thousand years, in the shamanic culture called Bon Po.¹⁰ This was based upon a cosmology expressed partly through practices of 'love magic' which, over the centuries, became evolved into a practice called Tantra. So the Eastern tradition of Bon Po may share Tantric practices with the early European techniques referred to by scholars (but never elaborated) as 'love magic'. Tantric scholar Philip Rawson says there are 'symbols in the vast natural caverns of Palaeolithic Europe', dating from about 20,000 BC, which can be 'accurately matched with symbols still used today by Tantrikas'.¹¹ And in the story, Odin shapeshifts into the form of a snake in order to gain entry into the mountain, and perhaps he is still in snake form when he first appears to Gunnloth. One of the most ancient and powerful symbols for cosmically creative and sexual energy, which figures in many Tantric works of art, is the snake.

We know that Odin practised some kind of 'love magic' with Gunnloth, who held the power to gain access to the mead of knowledge. Similarly, Rawson confirms that in the Tantric tradition, innumerable legends are recorded about the way its most famous male adepts were initiated, and that in these stories the central episode is usually a ritual sexual intercourse with a female 'power-holder', whose favours the initiate has to win.¹²

In the ancient European shamanic view, as we have seen in earlier chapters, organisms and the cosmos were considered as microcosm and macrocosm. The human organism was imaged as being constructed on the model of the cosmos,¹³ with the nine orifices in the body representing gateways to knowledge, and forming the basis of the 'sacred number nine'. As Philip Rawson explains, in the Eastern tradition of Tantra, knowledge of the cosmos is similarly considered to be contained, metaphorically, in the human body, and approached through our senses and worlds of experience.¹⁴

Odin has an intimate identification with the World Tree,

Yggdrasil, during his initiation and the tree embodies his psychological journey into the sacred worlds. He says of the tree that 'no one knows from whence those roots spring'. In the Tantric view also the human body grows as the World Tree, a plant from the 'ground' of the Beyond: 'just as the vital juices of a plant are carried up and outwards from the root through channels and veins, so are the creative energies in the human body.' This parallels the Wyrd concept we explored earlier of life force flowing through the body.

In Tantra, the life force flows in from the Beyond at the top of the skull. After spreading along through the body's channels it flows to the outermost tips of the senses, and even further out, to project the space around it. In Wyrd too this is the flow of life force, generated in the head and flowing outwards to the bodily extremities. In Eastern systems 'the pattern of vein and channels which comprise this system is called the "subtle body", and is the domain of ritual activity and symbolic practice.'

In the mythology of our European ancestors, the original wisdom of Kvasir – the human created by the declaration of peace between the warrior and fertility tribes of gods – represented conscious and unconscious forces which were concentrated and converted into the mead of inspiration. In Tantric ritual the emotions and the intellect are concentrated and aroused to their highest pitch so that 'the person's store of memories and responses can be awakened and re-converted into the pure energy from which they all originated'; an interesting echo of the creation of Kvasir.

We are told in the ancient manuscripts that Odin and Gunnloth spent three nights together, and they practised some kind of 'love magic'. Let us consider how this is practised in the Tantric tradition; the various parallels drawn above lead me to think there may be similarities to that enigmatic love magic of our European ancestors. In Tantra sexual intercourse is regarded as a metaphorical and spiritual union in which the sexual partners represent, identify with, and in spiritual terms *become* the macrocosm, 'the polarities of the cosmos transcended and unified'. A sacred ritual first identifies the 'ordinary man and woman' into personifications of male and female forces/gods; and then their union is consummated in sexual intercourse.

Through Tantric sexual intercourse, 'enormously prolonged' (the

three days and nights Odin and Gunnloth spent together ought to satisfy this requirement), arousing and controlling extraordinary energies, the man and woman are both led to experience the condition of the cosmos before the separation of polarities: 'It is an unparalleled joy, the joy of Being before and beyond Genesis.' Much of shamanic ritual is geared for returning to the source, the original human state of being, when all forces were united, and before humans were split off from original creative wisdom.

So if the parallels between the shamanic traditions underlying Tantra and those of the ancient European shamans hold true, we may now go one step further, and reconstruct the meditation ritual which sets up the sexual union, and the cosmological basis which informed Odin and Gunnloth's love-making, and which led to the three drinks of mead.

— Meditation on the Worlds of Knowledge —

Philip Rawson explains that the ritual begins with the man settling himself at the centre of his own world. He first visualised the Earth, with its continents and seas, as an immense plane disc spread out around a colossal central mountain pinnacle, like a high peak of the Himalaya. Around this disc he sets out the circling orbits of the planets and the apparently revolving constellations, perhaps visualising them in the form of anthropomorphic deities. According to this meditation, Odin would have visualised himself in the mountain, where he was with Gunnloth, surrounded by the nine worlds of knowledge and the three realms of Upperworld, Middle World, and Lowerworld. (This ritual is being described from the perspective of the male participant; Gunnloth would be developing a complementary meditative vision.)

In the next phase of Tantric ritual he identifies the inner central column of his spine as the centre around which the whole circuit of his world revolves. Cosmos and man are identified, all individual's centres are intrinsically the same. So Odin is the World Tree visualised, along with the nine worlds of knowledge, all connected to, flowing from, revolving around his position at its centre.

In Tantric meditation the component energies of the world are imagined as flowing out into the world from the meditator's own sensuous and mental structure. He focuses them upon the lowest of the chakras or 'lotuses' which he imagines strung vertically up the shining filament of the central column. The usual number is six, plus a seventh at the top of the skull. Some traditions visualise more, towering beyond the head into different levels of the Beyond.

It is a fascinating parallel to consider the three realms and the nine worlds of knowledge of early European shamanism ordered as this Tantric structure. In Tantra the mandalas are usually imaged as circular symbolic designs of energy set like saucers at intervals up the spine. The ancient Europeans depicted the three realms as such, as three concentric circular arrangements, one on top of the other. Since macrocosm/microcosm was a fundamental aspect of their world view, it seems possible that they too could have an 'inner' structure akin to the chakras of Tantra, in which the three realms and associated worlds of knowledge were arranged in ascending order for meditational and ritual purposes. So we may surmise that if Odin engaged in Tantric ritual with Gunnloth, he may have first set out a meditational image like the one above.

In Tantra, another pair of subtle energy channels, male and female, twine in a spiral around these lotuses, circulating energy. The Wyrð cultural image which corresponds with this is the world serpent which encircles Middle Earth, and then Bifrost, the flaming bridge, which connects the levels of the cosmos together. In a Tantric-like ritual, these images would symbolise circulating energy, connecting the levels. In Tantra, the subtle energy channels are controlled by the breath. Odin is known as the 'wind god', the god of breath and ecstasy, and here we have something close to an alchemical transformation through breathing of inner energies 'up through mountains'.

— The Three Crucibles —

The lowest lotus in Tantra is at the base of the pelvis, in the perineum just in front of the anus, located there as the subtle energy snake Kundalini who is each man's own goddess-world-projecting func-

tion. In building the energy to bring Kundalini to life in Taoist tradition, Rawson explains, 'the transformation takes place in three chief stages, in three "crucibles", each of which is itself a transformation, and is located at a place on a central column within the body. The lowest is inside the belly, just below the naval. The second is behind the solar plexus; the third is in the head, behind and between the eyes.'

They are called 'elixir-fields'. The lowest is contained in a 'cauldron' or 'furnace' with three feet, which is kept stoked up with an inner fire at the lowest point, almost to the end of meditation. This process has a remarkable similarity to the three containers of mead from which Odin seeks to drink: the cauldron called Odrerir (the exciter of inspiration, which is also a name of the mead itself), and the smaller kettles called Son (atonement) and Bohn (container). Odin proclaims in his sacred *Havamal* poetry that he obtained power from the magic Odrerir.¹⁵ But in comparing these elements of the ancient European story with Tantric traditions, the three containers of the mead symbolise aspects of Odin and Gunnloth's spiritual psyches.

In Tantra, what is transformed in the crucibles, the 'substance', is the sexual energy, called 'ching'. True Taoist ching was 'an intimate accumulation of the energies of both sexes, nourished by elaborate sexual exchange.' This was the 'alchemical substance', the essence around which the whole inner transformation revolved.

In Tantric tradition, the sacred sexual ritual, mindful of the world-disc within the circle of the lotus, awakens Kundalini, who begins her ascent. 'The initial sensation is violent and quite indescribable.' Thereafter Kundalini enters each higher lotus in turn as the practitioner focuses his mind on its structure and meaning. In the tradition of Wyrð, the Kundalini would be symbolised by the serpent-dragon called Nidhogg,¹⁶ who resides at the very bottom of the lowest world in the Lowerworld, climbing up the trunk of the World Tree.

— The Mead of Inspiration and the Supernatural Nectar —

Tantra traditions describe how, near the summit, the 'female energy encounters the male seed of Being, uniting with it sexually . . . From

this union a supernatural nectar flows down to flood the body, while the whole man or woman becomes identified with the source of self and world which lies beyond the crown of the head.'

It is intriguing that the climax of this Tantric ritual is a supernatural nectar flowing down to flood the body. The World Tree on which Odin underwent his initiation and which is created by him through his ecstatic meditation, is described as 'dripping dew so sweet that bees use it for the making of honey'. It is nectar. And honey is what mead is made from.

In Tantra, finally, the achievement of the ascent, the flow of Kundalini through sexual union ritualised, is sometimes symbolised by a great bird. The World Tree of Wyrð has at its very summit a great eagle. Odin tells us that after he had drunk the mead of knowledge, the supernatural nectar, he transformed into an eagle and flew away from the mountain. And he says that he thinks he could never have achieved this if Gunnloth had not helped him, 'that best of women in whose arms I had lain'.

In this speculative analysis I have regarded the World Tree, the three realms and the nine worlds of knowledge as aspects of a vision, a meditative ritual vision which accompanies initiation. It is reasonable surmise, for it is clear that in addition to the World Tree featuring centrally in the cosmology of Wyrð, it is also regarded as being formed by the meditator, the shamanic vision. The World Tree and associated images are a representation of the human subtle body and the flow pattern of subtle energies, to be apprehended through ritual.

And since the acquisition of the mead of knowledge, resulting in Odin transforming from a serpent into an eagle, is cast so clearly in sexual terms with his winning the love of Gunnloth, the possibility of a ritual of love seems plausible. If in some of the details above I may have forced the parallels a little too far, I believe nevertheless that the essence is right. The seat of Odin's wisdom is love. When Gunnloth, in Odin's words, 'Sat in the golden seat, and poured me precious mead,' the mead may well have been poured from pre-existing material pots. But a much richer and I believe truthful image is that the mead was formed from their sex together. The golden seat was the sexual position during intercourse, and the precious mead was the

nectar of their subtle energies produced by their union.

So in this final perspective on the wisdom of our ancestors, the pinnacle of Odin's initiatory quest, the three drinks of the 'mead of poetic inspiration', was made available to him by Gunnloth through their mutual love. So much of what I have described in this book has hinged on an understanding of the polarity of masculine and feminine forces that it is perhaps fitting that we should conclude with this celebration of the nectar, the mead of wisdom, which is generated by their coming together in the ecstasy of sacred sexuality.

I am not going to attempt to draw pragmatic lessons from this story for our lives today, for I think that as an inspirational image it serves us best as a narrative for our own meditation. We can think of the feminine and masculine as polarities within our own inner psyche, each representing crucial elements of our life, but also with the potential for integration. Or we might view the two forces as the coming together of lovers, metaphorically and physically, making more than the sum of our separate presences. And also the feminine and masculine polarities in the forces of nature itself, encompassing and enchanting the tragedy and the beauty of our species.